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## ONE OF THEM

By HENRY GOODMAN

As she stopped by the open window Mrs. Caroline Davis looked out to where her husband was cutting hay. His actions at table that morning had alarmed her, and as yet he had said nothing of why he had got up, and walking to the window, had looked out towards Justice Grove, listening intently all the while. She had wondered at his distraught features, at the frightened cringing of his lips as his eager, unsteady gaze reached out to the scene of the lynching.

She was brought to suddenly when she saw her husband stop in the middle of a wide, vigorous swing of his scythe. He lowered the glistening blade beside him and rested on the branched handle of the scythe. In perplexity, his hand trembling despite himself, he drew his bandana slowly across his brow, sweeping it across his eyes as if to clear them. She saw he was perplexed and uneasy, and made her way to him.

Johnnie Davis was in a daze. His sixty-year old eyes, gazing steadily to where the large, towering trees of Justice Grove made a wall of shadows against the sky, were focused on something he was trying to explain to himself. Again and again he brought the bandana to his eyes, pressing it against the lids as if to press out of his vision the thing that troubled him. But again he saw, in the tree where he and his neighbors had hanged George Lewis, as if suspended from the very branch, a something

white and nebulous. He wondered, did he see aright? Did he hear aright? The wind blowing through the trees fanned the white something and he heard the words: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me," and again he saw the fluttering white in the tree. His unsteady eyes gave shape to the thing he saw. Where had he seen such another figure before? Where before had the bended head of such an august figure brought a deep pathos into his heart? As he looked up at the trees they formed a translucence, giving background to a figure shining white and beckoning to him.

When his wife spoke to him, taking him gently by the hand, he turned, not recognizing her for the moment, and said, "Did you hear? It was He calling to me." And again, as the rustling of the large trees came to his ears, his eyes still gazing blankly at them, "Do you hear? 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me' ". He intoned the phrases slowly, a profound sorrow sounding in the words, and touching his wife so strangely she shuddered and shook his arm.

"Johnnie, Johnnie, what has come over you? Don't you see it's me is talking to you?"

He was impelled forward by her guiding hand, and with shaking head and troubled eyes, he followed where she led. She felt by the bearing of his body that fatigue weighed him down and every now and then she could catch and understand a mumbled phrase as it shook from his trembling lips. She heard the frequently repeated words, "All of us . . . all of us . . . repentant . . . only repentant . . ." and then when they reached the house she found him so limp he had to rest against the door post while she brought him a chair.

And all the time, in the silence that now held the pair, his mind was speaking very clearly to him — speaking in words that burned their way to his eyes so that he saw on the dark ground of his mind, as if written clear and unmistakable, the language of his thoughts. But he saw more than this. Involuntarily he witnessed the reënact-

ment of that meeting in his barn the outcome of which had been the hanging of George Lewis. He saw arise one after another his impassioned neighbors, Harry Todd, Leonard Dorsey, George Mosely and the others, each of whom in fiery, scathing words denounced the blindness of the law which could not see through the tricked evidence that was about to save George Lewis from the death he deserved. And now he saw himself, impelled he knew not by what rage of maddened vengeance, stand up and urge the enforcement of the old Hebrew law: "An eye for an eye." He heard his argument: "What though the law spares him, we know that law and justice have been circumscribed, and by the greater law of the prophets, it is for us to see that justice is not mocked and that George Lewis be made to pay the penalty for his misdeed."

Now he wondered what mad, grim purpose had given such an authentic ring to his argument. At that time, he had looked about him in the barn, the kerosene lamps flickering on the shadowed faces of his neighbors, and had seen that the strong words of his plea were having their effect. He did not know then and could not recall now who had spoken the phrase: "We must lynch him." He knew only that somehow, in the concentrated mind of the little group that had come in secret to his barn, there had come the thought that was like a brand of fire to their souls. After that impatience and secret planning drove them on to the scheme which gave them admission to the county jail whence they had fled with their prisoner.

Then had come the wild automobile ride down the night, the rushing up shadowy hills, the fleeing by windy valleys straight for Justice Grove. He recalled an abrupt turn in the road which threw a sudden shaft of moon on the white impassive face of George Lewis. Here his reveries broke. There was no going on, for a terror filled him and there came before his eyes the white figure in the high trees of the Grove.

"The whole world must know it", he said as he arose from his place. "The whole world, which thought George

Lewis justly punished, must know it was I and Harry and Leonard and George and the others."

Mrs. Davis knew now what was troubling her husband's mind. She saw with sudden vividness the scene of his homecoming after the hanging at Justice Grove. Again she saw the haggard face and the fear-haunted eyes of her husband as he came to the door in the cold dawn, the muscles of his face tense and flexed and the heavy breathing issuing from his open mouth. She remembered how she had caught him just before he fell in a faint and how, in his bedroom to which she had helped him, she had heard the horror of his story which strained incoherently from his helpless lips. She had done then what she could to quiet him and to bring him a measure of calm that would erase from his mind all the fearful details written so clearly upon it. In an instant she recalled the numerous outbreaks of his recollections when she was called upon to use all her mothering ways to win him from the terror that haunted him. She recalled her hopes that by making him realize their own precarious financial state she might get him to concentrate his mind on clearing the mortgage. She had gone out of her way, who had in the matters concerning the farm been usually submissive, to urge him to buy improved machinery that would call for intensive farming, thinking that this would center his mind upon their immediate needs. For a time these efforts of her own initiative seemed to have borne fruit in his growing calmness of mind. She had been led to think that now again his mind was settled in its normal ways and that once again he was finding peaceful directions for his mental activities.

But this had been largely because of the secretive impulse that had sprung up like a new bloom in her husband's nature. He had ceased telling her of the things that troubled him. He had thought for a while that within the battlefield of himself he would put to rout the haggard recollections that came to torment his peace. There

had grown within him the determination that repression was the road to victory. Therefore he had not given his wife those glimpses into himself which formerly had enabled her to guide his mind and feelings by her own kindly suggestions.

So when she reached out a detaining hand to stay his intention, the scope of which she had no means of knowing but whose very vagueness filled her with apprehension, she was made silent when he put her aside and started off. She saw that his eyes were clear and that his lips closed firmly as he stood up. She watched him on his way to George Mosely.

## II

On the porch overlooking the road George Mosely was talking to the son of Leonard Dorsey. Then as he saw Johnnie Davis walking down the road he pointed to the old man and shouted, "Ho there, Johnnie. Glad to see you this morning. We were just talking about your wonderful new tractor. We're going to see how it works some day if you don't mind."

Johnnie Davis seemed not to have heard, which surprised them both, for the old man had always a friendly greeting for his neighbors and they were somewhat taken aback by the cold silence that announced his coming. When he spoke it was in a voice devoid of inflection but calm and steady as if it told of a solemn and steadfast determination.

"George, we must tell the whole world about George Lewis. We must be repentant. I can't go on in this way any longer. Does not your heart tell you you can't either? Don't you see it is a great wrong we have done? Only if we are repentant can we hope for peace."

What had been happening in the inner life of Johnnie Davis was not entirely unknown to George Mosely and, through him, to the others who had helped in the lynching. Once, after a violent "attack" as they termed it

among themselves, in which the old man had lost all coherence of speech and thought, repeating only that they would all repent and announce their repentance, Mrs. Davis, wringing her hands and stammering for her tears, had come running to George Mosely. He was her nearest neighbor and although she did not know for certain that he had participated in the hanging, she more than suspected he had. This made her feel she could talk more freely to him of the fearful outbreaks that were disrupting the life of her husband. George Mosely had soothed her with the careless assurance that her husband, being as old man, was nervous and there was nothing for her to fear because he would soon get over his strange disturbances and thoughts.

Now, however, there was in the old man's voice a note so compelling that George Mosely, who had been inclined to wave him aside with an irrelevant phrase, said compassionately, "Come on, Johnnie, just you pull yourself together and you'll be all right. There will be peace for all of us. There's no call for feeling as you do. Don't you remember how sure we all felt — and now too — that he got what he deserved? It's too bad you are feeling this way. But there's no reason why you should. Everyone today feels just as we did then. Even his lawyers admit that he got what was coming to him."

But persuasive though his words were, and conciliatory, they had no effect upon the old man.

He was feeling his way toward a line of action that seemed to him the only positive means for finding lasting peace. This way he should have liked to see pursued by his companions of that night. Feeling that he had led to that other passionate action and that, therefore, he had made them share in the terrible tortures of mind that were his portion, he saw that it was for him to help them walk the ways of calm and quietude. To have George Mosely repudiate his efforts meant only that he should have to go to those others who had been with him on the terrible night.

When he reached the home of Leonard Dorsey, Leonard was awaiting him. Beside him stood his son who overheard the conversation between the old man and Mosely. Dorsey, a wealthy land-owner himself and the holder of the mortgage on Davis's home and territory, saw in the old man's mind and manner a danger that threatened to deliver those involved in the hanging into the hands of the state officials. He was prepared for whatever Johnnie Davis might say.

"Leonard", the old man said, "there is only one way for us to do. We who hanged George Lewis have sinned. I have seen Him in Justice Grove and He has called unto all of us that we may come to Him in peace and humility. Will you come with me? There is no other way, for there will be no peace in our hearts and no love, if we do not repent before the world."

Hearing the calm and humility with which John Davis spoke, for a moment Leonard Dorsey was taken off his guard. How could he meet with sternness an appeal and manner that was so meek? But the thought that this meekness was misguided and that in the implied conduct there lurked an unspoken danger, forced him to speak bluntly.

"No, Johnnie, what we did was right and just in the eyes of all of us. There can be no question of that. And you cannot today undo what is done."

The old man looked up with eyes that were hurt. His head shook of itself.

"You are not repentant?" he asked as if he could not understand. He would not argue, for there was to him no possible ground for disagreement. There came to him the feeling that his sin was even greater than he had thought, for surely it had been his impassioned urging and pleading for the death of George Lewis that had brought Leonard Dorsey to an unshakable belief in the rightfulness of that deed. It was right that he should be haunted by the pale, impassive face and calm unseeing eyes of George Lewis, as revealed by the flash of moon on



the hasty road to Justice Grove. And it was right, yes, more than right, that toward his heart should be pointed the finger of Him who swayed suddenly in those tall, melancholy trees of the Grove. His had been the mind from whose dark channels had flowed the evil suggestion. His must be the heart to bear the pain. Thinking these thoughts and feeling more and more clearly that upon him there was descending the burden of complete responsibility, he did not see the need for arguing with Leonard as he had seen no reason for further urging upon George Mosely that he share with him the sad responsibility of repentance. His the evil thought and therefore the deed. Surely his, and his alone, was the duty of doing penance.

He turned away from Leonard Dorsey and made as if to start off. Leonard held him gently. "Johnnie," he said in a voice that was a warning and a remonstrance. "You know, the mortgage on your home . . ." He chose the word, "home", for he knew that Johnnie and Mrs. Davis had a reverent love for their home. He knew, as who did not for miles around, how for years the thought "home" was like an altar candle in the cloistered life of the Davises. Since they had come up from the "poor whites" the Davises had toiled for a home, had beat the sun in their waking hours, had outstayed daylight in the fields, had mended and repaired again furniture almost beyond repair so as to make some saving, no matter how slight, that their home might the sooner become their own.

"Take the home if you want it."

Johnnie's answer was astounding. There was no passion in the voice, no resentment in the words. It was as if Johnnie had cast off his home which would now be really his own in just a few short months. It was as if Johnnie had cast from him the manifold activities of life.

With a depressed shake of the head Leonard Dorsey saw the old man move off. Then he bethought himself of what might come of Johnnie's intentions and he des-



patched his son to Harry Todd and to Simon Lee and the others. He had determined that it was best to hold a council to consider what action was necessary.

Fatigue had settled on the old man as he made his way up the hillside that led to Simon Lee's house. It lay upon him like the dust of the road, but it was also in his spirit. As he looked down upon the broad fields that held the swaying harvests, he wondered that there was not in him any more of the old joy that used to leap up at sight of ripened fields. He felt only a stirring unrest within and it seemed to labor beneath his heart and cloud his mind. As he stopped to rest, his breath left him in a long, despairing sigh.

Simon Lee was not at home. He had been called away by Lemuel Dorsey. But this had no meaning to the old man, just as Lemuel's preceding him from George Moseley's had meant nothing to him. He began the descent of the hill. But now he became conscious that things were wrong with him. A heaviness was settling upon his heart, a dull pain was manifesting itself in his chest as if something were seeking to expand there but was held by the ribs and flesh. His ears and cheeks flamed and grew cold and flamed again, so that he felt the heat upon his hand even before he touched his cheeks and ears. He was forced to rub his bandana across his eyes to clear them of the dimness that was misting them. When he took his way again a chill shot down his feet from his knees and his legs trembled in his walk.

His approach to the home of Harry Todd was a series of labored draggings. Harry Todd also was away. This piece of news intensified the old man's feelings. He had hoped to find Harry and to bring him the word of good cheer — repentance. However, now it was clear that he must be repentant for all of them. This thought was driven deeper into his consciousness and he felt a sudden fear lest his state of health interfere with his fulfillment of penance — a penance that would be a healing to the stricken hearts of all his companions.

He turned away from Harry's house saying not another word to Mrs. Todd who gazed at him quizzically. On the road he found himself a stout stick which afforded him some support.

From the road he saw his wife at work. Poised on the tall ladder that leaned lightly against the upper eaves of the house she was painting the second coat of white. She had taken up the work where he had left off. Once the knowledge of her zeal that trailed his own so close had been a source of meditative joy.

Now he felt no pleasure but only an unreasoned, if slight, resentment that she should be going on with a task that had become impersonal in his mind. The incongruity of her peaceful occupation as thrown in contrast to the restlessness of his mind, had called out in him an unlooked for impatience and brusqueness. It hurt him that she should still be enwrapped in that old calm while he was pervaded with a gnawing trouble that reached every aisle of his being. He wondered that she should be so unable to sense his uneasiness, or that being aware of it, she should yet retain a coldness of composure that held him off.

To avoid her, for he did not wish to give utterance to his resentment, he made for the pathway that led to the back entrance. But from her high perch his wife had seen him and now she called out to him. "Oh, John — John! Wait a while." And she began to climb down the ladder.

He stopped in the path. He watched her impersonally as if somehow she were not within the frame of his thoughts. He felt that her stopping him was in the manner of an intrusion, yet he had not the will nor the power to deny her.

"Harris tells me," she pointed to where Harris was mixing some paint in a bucket, "that the whole house will be done by tomorrow." Now that she sensed his aloofness she began to hesitate a little in her story, but she felt that she must force herself on so she ventured,

"And then won't you be glad to begin cleaning the inside, and won't it be good to go to town and get some of those new curtains and things?" Her joyfulness was forced and the merest hint of disapproval would have robbed her of whatever gayety her spirit had.

"Yes?" he said questioningly, his indifference breaking through, and he turned as if to make for the house.

"John — won't you say what is wrong, John?" and she started to follow him only to stop as she realized that he would say nothing to her despite any questioning. She went back to her work and in silence helped Harris mix his paints.

The old man walked slowly to his room. He was fatigued and at one time sat down on his bed resting his hands on his knees while he looked vacantly about him. But something within him like a current that was sweeping on without pause, lifted him from his place and with deliberate steps he walked about the room taking from the old limping chiffonier some of his underwear. This he placed, without thinking, into a large cloth that he found on a chair and tying the four corners he made a portable bundle of his things. He could hear the swishing of paint brushes outside his window as they swept against the boards, and now and then he heard the creaking of the ladder and an occasional thump as it was moved along the outer wall. When he looked out of the window upon the meadows where the blacks were working, it was as if he saw something unfamiliar that, in its newness, was not interesting enough to move any feeling. Only when he looked out toward Justice Grove a light leaped into his eyes where it flared like a frightened thing. Was that not the same figure he had seen before? Now clearly he could make out the nebulous whiteness of it as the trees shook and leaned over in the high wind. This animated his movements, and gave a certain firmness to his step.

He was not prepared to meet George Mosely at the foot of the stairs and, as if he were a child who had been

caught in the pantry, he let George take from out his hand the awkward bundle that he was carrying. Then, when he saw in the kitchen that Leonard Dorsey and all the others were there, his desire to remonstrate gave way to a sudden gladness which showed in his question, "Are you all coming with me?" Not a word was said to him as George Mosely helped him into the kitchen where the others were gathered. He sat down and looked about him, wondering why they were there, if it were not that they meant to do with him the penance he felt that all must do. He was disturbed when he heard the low weeping of his wife, and then he saw her white face looking at him with eyes that were pained and sorrowful.

Leonard Dorsey approached him. "Johnnie," he said, his voice firm, for he was determined that he and the others would keep the old man from bringing harm to himself or to any of them, "now we know just how you feel. It isn't like we were strangers and couldn't understand what is the matter. But we all remember how only a short while ago, right here on this farm, all of us got together and felt that we ought to keep the law even if the Governor of the State and everybody else was ready to break it by mocking justice. And you were with us, Johnnie. Do you remember when it looked like everyone was beginning to cool off and feeling not just right, how you got up and made us all see the truth? Now just remember that what was the truth then ain't changed since, and now everybody sees that we were right in doing what we did."

The gladness had left the old man's face and eyes. He heard through Leonard's words the slow weeping of his wife and it hurt him that she should seem to throw her weight upon the side of Leonard and the others who were there to dissuade him from doing that which was right.

"I remember," he said hurriedly as if seeking to shut out of his memory a thing he feared to bring before his eyes. "I wanted all of you to come with me. Now I see

I am the only one who must repent. It was I led you to hang George Lewis. Now let me go and do penance."

Before these words, spoken with more intensity than the old man had displayed hitherto, each one there fell into a silence as though each feared to intrude upon a feeling none shared. It was a feeling that made itself manifest to all of them. But it could not silence the old man's wife who, looking compassionately upon the companion of her life, saw only the hardships he was arraying before himself. She wept as if she alone were in the room, and as if her husband had already left her to the late years of life.

George Mosely felt that he could venture to speak. "Johnnie, and have you thought of what must become of all this, and of Caroline?"

"What will happen to all this?" the old man asked blankly, with an indifference that seemed innate. "Caroline comes with me," he added as if that were a settled matter, but hearing her weeping he stopped as if he had bethought himself suddenly. "If she will not come with me, well, she may stay here."

He turned from George Mosely and without a glance at his wife walked out of the room. The others looked after him. Leonard Dorsey's face was a picture of inhibited energies, for he had meant to use the foreclosure of the mortgage as a conclusive argument of coercion.

They were still looking at one another and studying Caroline who was bunched up in her chair, weeping, when the old man reëntered the room with unusual calmness. He looked about and then went to where his bundle lay. He picked it up from the floor and adjusted it cautiously under his arm. Very carefully he stooped to pick up the heavy stick he had set down on the floor and then, approaching his wife, he said, "Caroline, I shall wait for you on the road." He left the room by the side door which opened on a pale sunset.

Caroline arose as if impelled by a power that gave her no room for questioning. She walked over to the ancient

sideboard where was folded some of her wearing apparel. This with a little food she made into a parcel, and in silence she also started for the door. But here she stopped as if she had somehow summoned enough strength to combat the power that was carrying her on. Her words were a pathetic cry against a force that was overcoming her, and, she feared, crushing her husband: "If we should need you, won't you help us?"

They answered in a shaking of heads and whispered assurances, "Have no fear!" and then they looked out on the road where the old man was waiting for his wife. They saw the two take the road that led up the hillside towards Carleton.

#### IV

Their journey commenced in silence, but the mood which was now becoming dominant within the old man made continued silence impossible. It was as if with every step onward Johnnie was reaching closer to a treasured goal, and this feeling seemed to clear away the dust that had fallen upon his spirit, and somehow anointed him with a flowing hope.

"Caroline," and this time his eyes, looking at her, showed a depth of tenderness, "you don't know how much better I feel already. Just knowing that I may atone. How much I should want to atone for them also." The mere expression of the wish to do penance for his comrades whom he had misled on that fatal night, now brought with it a measure of solace.

The tide of feeling within the old man had turned. Before, when the direction of the tide had been toward doing penance but his feelings had encountered the rooted antagonism of his comrades, there had come into his being a bitterness of remorse. Now with the tide turned and he, himself, on the road toward atonement, his heart was beginning to learn the lifting of the weight of bitterness. He looked forward to the time when he would

stand up before the people and confess to them publicly, openly, and with an easier heart, the sore sin that had troubled him so keenly.

At Carleton, which they reached later in the evening than they had counted on, a revivalist was holding forth. His large tent was lit by many smoking lamps and the fresh sawdust and shavings sent up their turpentine smell. They entered the tent to the low moaning of a hymn that was being played on an ancient bellows-organ.

Caroline watched her husband's face and a great pain stole into her heart as she realized the feelings that were growing up within him.

His face, and especially his eyes, betrayed the keen promptings that were filling him. His lips began to move without his uttering a word, and his heart beat sharply as, looking up to the high roof of the lamp-lit tent, he seemed to see the tremulous and indistinct figure in white. Now his lips began to form a prayer: "Thank God for this hour. If there is redemption on earth it shall now be mine." In the eagerness that mounted within him, he shook off the calming hand of his wife, and when there came a pause as the organ ceased its weary groaning, he stood up in his place. His eyes fastened firmly on the revivalist who ceased even before he began to speak, and his uneasy movements as he stood, his head shaking from side to side, drew the attention of the congregation, most of whom knew him and his wife.

The revivalist, who was about to begin to address his congregation, stopped his eager looking about the tent as if he felt that there was a phenomenon more impressive than any he might evoke. A silence came over the people and this seemed to give the old man time in which to make firm the words with which he began.

"Lord God who art mighty, hear me for Thy might is more than Death! Thy forgiveness is as the oil of healing and Thy wrath endureth unto the end of life. Before these my brethren I am come to beg Thy forgiveness."

Here the old man, with eyes that were unseeing for



again they had filled with a vision that was not for those about him, turned his head and made a pathetic motion with his hands. It was a plea to his friends. It was a confession also of a grievous sin.

"I, who killed George Lewis, am come to let all men know of my sin against the word of God. To all the world I shall proclaim my guilt, for all the world must learn that the word of God is law and is eternal. No peace shall fill the heart that has broken faith with the Lord. Brothers, I stand before God and before you a murderer. The stamp of Cain is on my soul. Will you not forgive me that I may again walk the earth with peace in my heart? Lord God who art merciful, fill their hearts with forgiveness. Give them to see with Thy all-knowing kindness that I may again lift my head among men and carry Thy peace in my heart."

He did not see the breathlessness that held them. His being was a jar of yearning which he wanted them to fill with their forgiveness. He sat down, trembling and shaken with intense expectancy. Oh, the miracle of their forgiveness! How the mere thought that they would extend to his suffering heart the word of understanding and pardon gave him a taste of the peace he craved! Unconsciously, with a confident caress he pressed the hand which his wife reached out to him as she helped him sit down. As he looked about him with dim eyes, he did not see the startled incredulity that flashed from face to face, nor did he notice the electric whispers that leaped from person to person. He did not know that this was an instant circle of doubt, of unbelief, into which his confession could never enter.

Did they not know old Johnnie Davis? Who would believe that he was a murderer? Did they not know the almost unbelievable kindness of their old friend? Had they not been grieved to hear how sadly his life had been affected by the hanging of George Lewis? Had they not regretted he should have chosen to suffer so, for no sin of his own? And now as they all stole secret

glances at him, did it not wring their hearts to know that it was too true; Johnnie Davis's mind had really been touched by the lynching?

The revivalist was again about to speak. If this were so, he thought, not knowing who Johnnie Davis was, if this man were a murderer, as he said, was it not a glory to God that he had in the open, before all these men and women, come to pray forgiveness? From the congregation a few men stepped forward to the revivalist's platform. In a few words they made him see that this confession was not really the confession for any deed of Johnnie Davis. Hearing their words, he could not restrain the expression of the great sorrow he felt. Then, feeling that perhaps he could say something to allay the sufferings of the old man, he walked down the broad aisle to where Johnnie and Caroline were seated. The eager look in the old eyes held him silent for a moment. Then, leaning over so he might stroke the sharp shoulders of the old man, the revivalist said, sadly, "Johnnie, it is too bad. I am sorry. You must not take it so."

No forgiveness then? So he was not to receive the forgiveness of his fellows? New agony flooded the old man. An anguish filled him that raged and tore far into him. For a moment something within him seemed to give before the heavy flood of this new feeling. He sensed a painful emptiness as if somehow things inside of him had dematerialized. This time he reached out his hand to his wife and she took it tremblingly in her own. He sought to clear his eyes of the dimness that came there, but he could not. He made a second effort to rise. His fellows would not forgive him? With God calling to him to confess and repent, his own brothers would not take him back to their hearts? Sorrow and silence filled him and, shaking as he arose, he reached the aisle and led Caroline out of the tent.

Outside he rested heavily on his stick, while one hand held to Caroline's shoulder. The tears cleared from his throat, and gave way to a sigh. Then taking his bundles

from Caroline, he led down the narrow road from the tent saying, "Come, we will go on."

That night they rested in the open. From the winds that walked the roads they took shelter behind a mausoleum in a cemetery. But there was no sleep for either. Caroline could not fall asleep because of her concern in Johnnie. The old man seemed for a while to have felt the quieting influence of the night and of the steady murmuring of the trees beside the road. But this peacefulness was not for long. The faint stirrings in the trees and the occasional falling and breaking of twigs prodded him with their calm. He stood up and soon was walking about among the white stones, speaking to himself. When Caroline joined him he was talking aloud.

"You whose souls are now with God, do you not forgive my sins? Do you not know me repentant?"

He was continuing, but when his wife touched his hand and drew him with her, he sensed the terror that was shuddering in her and grew quiet.

Dawn found them walking on. The chill weather shook them and bleared their faces. The sun, coming up, laid its warmth upon their backs and gave them fresh strength. They walked into Harrington to find that the Sunday morning services were just commencing in the Methodist Episcopal Church on Main Street.

Their entrance into the church and their slow walking down the central aisle, caused a flurry of whispers to run through the building. The pastor, seeing the dust and stain-covered clothes and tired faces of the newcomers, walked to them as they found places.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly. "You come from a distance, do you not? You are doubly welcome."

"I am a murderer. I have come to confess before you all and before God. I killed George Lewis. God had forgiven me and I am repentant. Will you not forgive me, you and our brothers?"

The sexton who had come up to listen to the talk of the strange pair, walked away and whispered to some of the

ushers. Soon many of the congregation were gathered about them, and the whisper went about that there was an insane man in the church.

This time the old man felt that there was a coldness in the circle about him. He stood up, his intense feeling forcing the words to his lips. "Will you not forgive me? Will you not accept my repentance? I who stand before you am a murderer. But the Lord who is merciful forgives the repentant. Will you not forgive me who walk in sorrow for my sin?"

The congregation drew back in silence, taking their places in the pews so as to leave the sexton free to approach the old man and woman.

"I am sorry, brother," he said to Johnnie, "the services must go on. We must have no disturbance here. You will come out with me, won't you?"

In a daze the old man took from the bench his bundle and stick and holding Caroline's hand, followed the sexton to the door. The sexton said nothing, but his hand pointed to the stairs and his manner indicated that he wanted them to leave.

"I want to pray — to confess before God and the whole world," Johnnie began.

The sexton mumbled, "The services must go on, you know," and not finishing the sentence, drew the door after him and shut the pair out.

A great fatigue seized upon the old man's limbs. It seemed as though his hands and feet were weighted and his body limped and sagged. Caroline helped him sit down on the top step and her heart cried within her as she watched him hold his head between his hands. He rubbed his eyes in futile efforts to make them clear. Everything blurred within them and his head and hands shook.

"Caroline, Caroline, will they never forgive?"

There was in the manner of both as they walked down the street, an air of such dejection that they attracted a few children of the streets who scented something mysterious in the pair. Seeing them apparently inoffensive

and feeling their anticipations of excitement betrayed by the meek demeanor of the elderly couple, the boys decided that it was for them to stir the old people into quickened animation. This they attempted to do by yelling and cat-calling as they followed slowly along.

At the realization of what it implied to have the boys follow them, the old people were held speechless in fear. It came to both that the boys were following them as if they were drunkards. The thought was petrifying and terrible. For a moment it held them motionless in terror and then, acting on an impulse of self-defense, the old man turned and addressed the circle of howling boys.

"I'm not drunk . . . don't you see. I'm not drunk. Please, please don't follow us." If anything were needed to incite the boys it was just such a broken-voiced plea.

The crowd of boys grew. Leaders began to make themselves evident by their more daring approach to the old people. Soon one of these youthful chiefs felt that his must be the honor of laying his hands on the couple, and he made an alert, quick run from out the crowd, struck the old man squarely between the shoulders, and was back in the crowd before the old people could turn to discover him.

Fear and instinctive desire to run leaped up in the old man. It was unreasoned, but somehow all reason fell before the onslaught in the public street. Seizing Caroline firmly by the hand the old man started off on a run. The boys started in pursuit, adding jeers to the cat-calls and shouts, and now throwing handy missiles picked up from the street.

The old man's breath gave out and Caroline, bringing him to a stop, put her arms about him, while with fear-strained eyes she pleaded with the crowd that surrounded them. Something in her attitude and in that of the breathless, gasping old man shamed the boys and hesitatingly they withdrew.

The flight and the excitement of the pursuit sent a

tremor through the old people, and as they resumed their walk it was with nervous, uncertain steps. A man, seeing them, shabby, disheveled and seemingly lost, asked them where they were going.

"I am not going anywhere. I must confess to the whole world that I killed George Lewis. I am seeking forgiveness."

On hearing this answer, the man turned away and walked off. He was awed by the strangeness of the pair.

Night overtook them on the road. The caked mud under foot made walking difficult. Besides they were worn with flight and lack of rest and sleep. They turned off into a grass-grown clearing and there fell asleep.

The old man was the first one up. He had slept a little because of the weariness that held his body, but soon the course of his thoughts had broken through the fetters of sleep and had stirred him where he lay. He opened his eyes on a wall of shaking trees that touched with their shaggy branches the low, dark sky. He could see the stars but his mind saw only his task.

Dimly there came to him the understanding of what difficulties lay before him. He knew now with a realization that almost took from him his strength, that he would have to win over the whole world to a mood in which forgiveness would be within its gift. This thought precipitated a train of recollections and soon he perceived a thread of common purpose that bound together the revivalist at Carleton, the church meeting at Harrington, and the turning away of the man who had asked them where they were going. They had refused to forgive him. They were joined in their denial of his plea. They were one in repudiating his penance.

There was in this knowledge a power that was crushing. The thought caused a painful contraction about his heart and a moan broke from his lips.

Caroline heard him and awoke. Her own mind had been filled with the thought that now she might be enabled to persuade him home and that now in his own

realization of what had been happening, she would find reinforcement for her hope and desire. She turned to him where he was lying and touched him reassuringly.

"John, John, wouldn't it be good to turn home?"

His silence forbade her speaking again.

He arose painfully and helped her up. They made their way to the road where they brushed one another's clothes, ridding them of leaves and wisps of clinging grass.

"We will go on," he said.

They entered a town just when the factory whistles were shrilling the call to work. They were gazed at curiously by girls and men with lunch boxes in their hands. The workers made way for them to pass, calling to them in greeting.

This time the old man answered in warm greeting instead of with a confession. It had forced itself upon him that in this way he might win over instead of repelling those he approached. He was encouraged to stop and soon the two were circled by a group of curious men and women.

"Friends," the old man began, "you would not do me harm, would you? Will you withhold your forgiveness from me? I am a murderer . . . I killed George Lewis. I am penitent. I ask you all to have mercy. Will you not forgive me? The Lord, our God, has shown me of His mercy and forgiveness. Will you deny me?"

The spirit in which he spoke was foreign to his hearers. The words he said were distant to their feelings and instead of awakening sympathy, he called forth a shouting of, "C'mon, the old fellow's cracked."

Theirs was an open denial of his plea.

"Oh, you're tired, ole man, you need a rest, that's what you need."

"Brothers," he pleaded, seeing them turn away, "brothers, I need your forgiveness. Do not turn from me, brothers. Say you believe me repentant . . . don't leave me that way . . ." And now his whole



heart poured into his words as if this would dam their drawing off into the factory yards beyond the iron fences at which the old man stopped.

But his pleading and the tears in his eyes as his hands made ineffectual reachings out to them, could not hold the men and women.

Caroline's touching his arm came like a breaking in on his mind. It was like a shock of unreality upon his overwrought feelings. Helplessly and with stumbling steps he followed her, clutching her arm the better to guide himself. Within him there was a turmoil of feelings which fused into a sensation of pain that pervaded his every fibre. It beat on his ribs and chest and throbbed in his limbs.

"They won't forgive. They won't forgive me," he mumbled piteously.

A young man who had been in the crowd approached them. "You said something about George Lewis?"

It was a straw thrown to the old man. "I killed him. It was I who hanged him. God in His mercy has forgiven me."

But the young man did not wait. Instead he said, "Why don't you go up to the cemetery. That's where George Lewis is buried." He pointed up the street and then made his way to the factory door.

Slowly the old people walked up the street. Caroline patted the old man's trembling hand and besought him to grow calm. But her words and caresses could not stem his mumblings. He hastened their steps until they stood within the arched gates of the cemetery. An intense impatience coursed through the old man, upon whom the quiet air and sunny peacefulness of the cemetery had no effect. The feeling drove the old man on . . . giving him strength for rapid motion.

In his mind was tumult. Stone after stone leaped to his vision as he hastened down the paths, urged on by the one thought, George Lewis, which sounded in his mind in pleading tones.

Caroline brought him to a stop. She pointed to a low stone on which he saw the name, George Lewis. A mingling of noises rushed into his head and his eyes misted as he fell to the ground. His haggard face lay close to the browning grass and his fingers trembled in pleading.

"George Lewis, I who killed you, beg your forgiveness. I cannot go on. God, our Lord, has shown me His mercy. Say you, too, forgive me. Say you know my penitence."

His voice became incoherent in a convulsion of tears that shook his body and he did not feel Caroline's caressing touch as she sought to soothe him. She sat down beside him and stroked his quivering cheeks.

His fingers reached eagerly into the soft soil of the grave and his pleading, a flow of incoherent words, ceased. Now he rested his head on her sheltering arms and through his tears, his voice shaken with terror, he said:

"Caroline, Caroline, he won't forgive . . . no one forgives."

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#### CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Henry Goodman contributed a story to the last volume of *THE MIDLAND*. He is a resident of Brooklyn and a contributor to *The Bookman* and other magazines. He is one of the editors of *Clay*, a quarterly which the editor of *THE MIDLAND* takes pleasure in recommending.

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FRANKLIN H. ALLISON, Notary Public,  
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